



## Chief of Naval Operations Battle of Midway Commemoration (10-15 min remarks)

- **Intro**
- Good morning, and thank you for the honor of speaking at today's commemoration.
- First, welcome the many distinguished guests here with us today.
- [see VIP card]
- No better place to gather than on the decks of *USS Midway* -- commissioned just one week after the end of WWII -- to commemorate one of the most important battles in US naval history.
- This year marks a number of important anniversaries:
  - 100th anniversary of the U.S. entry into WWI;
  - 50th anniversary of the Vietnam War;
  - And the reason we're gathered here today, the 75th anniversary of the Battle of Midway.

- Midway, ranks with the greatest Naval battles in history. So appropriate that we take time to recall the battle each year - so many lessons to learn.
- Would like to review just one perspective - one narrative timeline - that demonstrates that in the business of war, and indeed in national defense, the margins of victory are razor thin...
- So thin, that we all, every one of us, must give our all in every situation - never give up. Fight to our last measure to guarantee our freedom.
- So many battles, and especially Midway, demonstrate that it's impossible to know what action, seemingly small, mundane, or even ineffective at the time, will in fact be decisive...
- In hindsight, they seem like strokes of amazing luck. And when you put several strokes of luck in series...it trends towards miraculous.
- **First Stroke -- Rochefort Breaks the Japanese Code**

- Like any good military operation, success at Midway was enabled by an accurate intelligence picture.
- Station Hypo -- the shorthand term used to describe the US Navy's codebreaking and signals intelligence operations -- embedded within the Naval Communications Station in Pearl Harbor, HI.
- CDR Joe Rochefort [ROSH-for] was assigned as officer-in-charge, and his orders were to report all significant intelligence directly to Navy Headquarters in Washington DC.
- But Rochefort routinely passed information to LCDR Edwin Layton, a close personal friend from his Japanese language course who was one of only a handful of trusted advisors with direct access to the Pacific Fleet Commander, Admiral Chester Nimitz.
- Nimitz firmly believed that commanders should receive intel directly from the source, unfiltered by anyone else. He challenged LCDR Layton to “think like Admiral Yamamoto” and to provide estimates of where he thought the Japanese Fleet might maneuver.

- In early 1942, Rochefort and his team at Hypo began successfully breaking the Japanese Navy general operating code, “JN-25B.”
- Rochefort noticed the letters “AF” in several Japanese transmissions, and believed that they stood for Midway -- the objective of the Japanese operation.
- One of Rochefort’s team put together a very clever plan, using a deceptive series of messages, to confirm that “AF” indeed represented Midway.
- That gave Nimitz the confidence he needed to issue OPLAN 29-42, which directed *Enterprise* and *Hornet* to proceed to Midway -- with *Yorktown* to follow once repairs were completed in Hawaii.
- CAPT “Ned” Beach best summarized the significance of Rochefort’s miraculous codebreaking in his book *The United States Navy: 200 Years*: “To Commander Joe Rochefort must forever go the acclaim for having made more difference, at a more important time, than any other naval officer in history.”

- **Second stroke -- Yorktown**

- What was she even doing there???
- Had been severely damaged in Battle of Coral Sea
- Pulled into Pearl Harbor, and the SY, that had demonstrated such bravery during the attack, again showed their patriotism, skill, and mettle...
- Repaired Yorktown in 2-3 DAYS instead of 2-3 MONTHS, as would have been the normal time. Amazing!
- Compared to the enemy, who were not able to repair the two Japanese carriers damaged at Coral Sea
- This set the stage for the fight...
- Matchup was 3 US carriers to 4 Japanese, instead of what might have been 2 vs 6. A much different fight...
- Not only did she show up, but she was decisive. The most experienced carrier in the group, she launched the critical strikes against the enemy.
- As well, her crew demonstrated amazing toughness - fighting extensive damage from attacks - to stay in the fight. This required tremendous effort by the enemy in several attacks, effort that would have been spent on other US ships and

aircraft had Yorktown not been so tough before she was eventually lost to a Japanese submarine attack.

- **Third stroke of luck -- *Nautilus* Delays *Arashi***
- In general, submarines did little to contribute at Midway...the submarine force was still recovering from missed opportunities to innovate during the interwar period
- Nimitz, himself a submariner, was disappointed
- But there was one story worth noting...*USS Nautilus* (SS-168), under the command of LCDR William Brockman, was one of only three submarines from Task Force 7 to make contact with the Japanese during the battle, but the actions of her crew undoubtedly played a critical role in the eventual outcome.
- On June 4, *Nautilus* had been attracted to the location of the Japanese Fleet by smoke from the first US aircraft to reach the carriers -- six TBF Avenger torpedo bombers and four B-26 Marauders, all launched from Midway Island.
- The submarine tried repeatedly to attack the Japanese force, but with little luck:

- Initially strafed by an alert Japanese fighter;
- Bombed by a Japanese float plane; and
- Depth-charged by the light cruiser.
- Once the depth charging stopped, LCDR Brockman came to periscope depth and fired on *Kirishima* with two torpedoes, but one hung in the tube and the other missed.
- His tenacity was rewarded with yet another sustained barrage of 42 depth charges, two of which clanged off *Nautilus*' bow without detonating.
- In the meantime, the carriers had steamed off to the northeast. And a single destroyer -- *Arashi* -- was assigned to stay behind to inflict additional damage on the pesky *Nautilus*.
- One done with that mission - or more accurately, frustrated with trying, she made best speed to catch up to the rest of the force - setting course directly for the carriers, and answering all ahead flank.
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- **Fourth stroke -- McClusky Finds the Carriers**
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- That critical decision played a role in our third miracle.

- Earlier that same day, at 0700, RADM Raymond Spruance -- in command of Task Force 16 -- launched air groups from both *Hornet* and *Enterprise* to attack Japanese carriers as they recovered their aircraft following bombing runs at Midway Island.
- The *Hornet* air group, commanded by Stanhope Ring, departed on a course well north of the Japanese formation and never sighted the carriers.
- The *Enterprise* air group, led by LCDR Wade McClusky, nearly met the same fate. The 33-plane dive bomber strike had initially overshot the Japanese force to the south, and their fuel state was reaching a critical point.
- McClusky had two options -- turn back towards *Enterprise*, or take the shorter and presumably safer option to land at Midway. But in a stroke of luck, at 0955, he spotted *Arashi* at *full speed*, and assumed that the destroyer was heading north to catch up to the carriers.
- His instincts were correct, and McClusky set a course using *Arashi's* wake as a vector. At 1020, his air group encountered



Carrier Division 1, and commenced dive bombing and strike operations.

- Almost simultaneously, *Yorktown's* more experienced dive bomber squadron attacked Carrier Division 2 - the two Japanese carriers to the north.
- These attacks were enabled by the incredible bravery of Naval Aviation. 70 US carrier-based aircraft were lost that morning. 37 of 41 torpedo bombers, 21 dive bombers, as 12 fighters. 40% of the planes involved in the attack.
- In five minutes, three Japanese carriers were reduced to flaming infernos, and the course of the war in the Pacific was changed forever. The fourth carrier in the Shido Butai would be attacked later, making it 4 for 4

- **Conclusion**

- It might be tempting to attribute the victory at Midway to luck - a series of lucky strokes that almost add up to a miracle.
- But as with all things, a team makes its own luck.

- It was the toughness of the shipyard and the sailors on Yorktown that brought her to the fight and kept her at the front and center of the effort from start to finish
- It was the cleverness and tenacity of Team Hypo, Rochefort and Layton, informing admiral Nimitz of the Japanese plan
- It was the boldness of ADM Nimitz to use that intelligence and, with a sense of calculated risk, take the initiative and commit his forces to Midway (against the desired of Washington, I might add...)
- It was the fighting spirit of the CO of Nautilus who tangled up the Japanese destroyer that eventually pointed the dive bombers to the carriers.
- It was the skill and toughness of the USMC defenders on Midway that inflicted so much damage on the attacking aircraft, essentially paralyzing the Japanese strike force from attacking the carriers.
- And it was the eternal bravery, skill, and boldness of Naval Aviation that closed to the attack, against great odds, with inferior aircraft, and never deviated from their mission.

- LCDR John Waldron, CO of Torpedo Squadron Eight, told his men, “if only one plane is left, I want that man to go in and get a hit.”
- And that’s exactly what his squadron did
- And that's why we still revere names like Waldron, Gay, McClusky, Best, and Thach.
- In the end, Yamamoto had it all wrong.
- Arrogant from his victory at Pearl Harbor and in the first six months of the war, he had determined that the Americans “lacked the will to fight.”
- How wrong. How very wrong.
- Today, the men and women of the US Navy continue to draw inspiration from our Greatest Generation - especially these Midway survivors here with us today. Our Sailors serve with the same integrity, accountability, initiative, and toughness, and they give their very best at every effort - including their lives if called - because one never knows what will be the decisive action that makes the critical difference in the end.

- Perhaps the final and greatest outcome of this battle is the peace that followed this war, and the strong alliance, lasting partnership and close friendship that has emerged between the United States and Japan.
- It is this combined team - tougher together - that continues to guarantee stability, freedom, peace and prosperity for all in the Pacific..
- Before I close, I have one favor to ask of you. Before you lay your heads down tonight, pray for those who fought at Midway -- those who paid the ultimate price in battle, those who have passed since the war, and those who are still with us today.
- Pray also for those Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, and Marines deployed around the globe, guarding our peace.
- Thank you, God bless all of you, and God Bless America.